

Internet protest stalls online piracy bills in Congress

Posted by
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Washington (CNN) - In the wake of a high profile and stunningly effective protest by some of the biggest brand names on the internet, congressional leaders announced Friday they would shelve two online piracy bills that once had broad ***bipartisan support***.

Top Democrats in the Senate have known for days that the bill was unlikely to survive the protest, which was supported by web mainstays like Google, Twitter, and Wikipedia. That became even clearer after the blackout of some websites Wednesday when a flood of lawmakers from both parties changed their positions and said they would no longer vote for the bill unless it was reworked.

The two bills – known as PROTECT IP Act (PIPA) in the Senate and Stop Online Piracy Act (SOPA) in the House – are backed by content providers like Hollywood studios and music recording companies. They complain they are bleeding millions of dollars every year because of illegal downloads of their copyrighted materials on the loosely regulated Internet and they lobbied Congress for stricter protections. Time Warner, the parent company of CNN, was one of the many major media companies supporting the original versions of the legislation.

In recent weeks, tech companies like Google became wary of the legislation's impact on Internet freedom and wanted changes to the bill. In particular, those companies don't like a provision that would allow courts to shut down access to web sites believed to be pirating content.

In announcing his decision to postpone a vote scheduled for Tuesday on whether to take up the bill, Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid said he hopes a compromise will be reached in the coming weeks after protestors raised "legitimate issues" about the bill's impact on the workings of the Internet.

Negotiators must "forge a balance between protecting American's intellectual property, and maintaining openness and innovation on the Internet," Reid said in a statement.

"We all agree that we must do more to combat on-line theft of intellectual property," said Senate Republican Leader Mitch McConnell in a statement. However, the PIPA bill "raised serious legal, policy and operational concerns," he said.

Congress will now "have the opportunity to study and resolve the serious issues with this legislation and prevent a counterproductive rush toward flawed legislation," McConnell said.

In the House, Republican Judiciary Committee Chairman Lamar Smith issued a statement saying, "Congress cannot stand by and do nothing while American innovators and job creators are under attack."

However, he said his committee would "postpone consideration of the legislation until there is a wider agreement on a solution.